

FROM THE CELL TO THE WORLD

three other women, dressed in her habit, who went in her company. Hearing her fame, I managed to see her and to gain her friendship, in such wise that she oftentimes came here into my house."¹ We have no clue to the identity of the writer, nor any record elsewhere of this first visit of Catherine to the great city with whose political turmoils she was soon to be associated. Probably on this occasion she made the acquaintance of various Florentine citizens, of all classes in the State, and more particularly of Messer Angelo Ricasoli, who had succeeded Cardinal Piero Corsini as bishop, and Niccolo Soderini, a wealthy and influential man, of a deeply religious mind, one of the "popolani grassi" and a leading spirit in the Parte Guelfa. She left Florence on June 29, and returned to her mother's house at Siena, to find the pestilence raging and a partial recurrence of the horrors of 1348 within the city.

This frightful scourge had appeared in May, and it ravaged Tuscany all through the summer until September, spreading thence through northern and central Italy even across the Alps. While attacking all ages and classes, the mortality was particularly terrible among the children. And the black shadow of famine dogged its footsteps. There was fearful scarcity of everything— bread, wine, meat, and oil were at unheard-of prices. In the great Tuscan cities, the government collected all the materials that could be made into bread, and doled it out by ticket; but, even so, there was not enough to go round. At Siena, the Spedale di S. Maria della Scala acted up to its great traditions and devoted all its resources to succouring the poor ; and it was heroically supported by the Casa della Misericordia and the Disciplinati of Our Lady. The death-carts went from street to street, gathering up the dead ; the priests, who tended the dying and buried the victims, in many cases shared their fate. The pestilence was already at Florence when Catherine was there, and

¹ *Mtracoh e transito di Santa Caterina*, Biblioteca Riccardiana, MS. 1267, f. 190. This little work was printed by Grottanelli in 1862, under the title *Akuni miracoli di Santa Caterina da Siena, secondo che sono narrati da un Anonimo, mo con-temporaneo*. Cf. Augusta Drane, I. pp. 216-218.